

**TESTIMONY OF
HABITAT FOR HUMANITY INTERNATIONAL**

**Given by:
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Introduction

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, friends and fellow panelists. On behalf of Habitat for Humanity, I appreciate this opportunity to share with you an update on Haiti, with a particular, but not exclusive, focus on shelter needs six months after the devastating earthquake of January 12.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge my fellow panelists and thank you for all you are doing to in support of the people of Haiti. I also want to recognize the hard work of our staff members and all those who are working so hard in Haiti right now. I am honored to be with you here today.

Habitat for Humanity is an ecumenical Christian ministry that welcomes to its mission all people dedicated to the cause of eliminating poverty housing. Since its founding in 1976, Habitat has built, rehabilitated, repaired or improved more than 350,000 houses worldwide, providing simple, decent and affordable shelter for more than 1.75 million people.

Habitat's response to disasters

Habitat's global Disaster Response program focuses on the housing needs that arise from natural disasters and humanitarian emergency conflicts. We meet the challenges of these events worldwide using a number of integrated approaches that revolve around our core competencies of sustainable shelter and housing solutions.

We offer expertise in technical information; program design and implementation and disaster response policies, protocols and procedures. We also provide support and informational resources for disaster risk reduction—helping communities in disaster-prone areas protect themselves against future threats. Finally, Habitat advocates for policies that better prepare the public, private and nonprofit sectors to plan for and respond to disasters.

More than 60,000 families worldwide have been served under Habitat's disaster

response programs in the past 10 years. By giving communities the means to rebuild, Habitat has been able to support, empower and assist families in creating both temporary and permanent shelter solutions.

Habitat in Haiti

Habitat has been at work in Haiti for 26 years assisting families through a variety of housing initiatives including new home construction, progressive or incremental building and home repairs and improvements. Habitat also works with communities to help strengthen Haitian capacity in construction skills, disaster risk reduction and financial literacy as we operate in coordination with community-based organizations and government agencies.

As part of our three-fold response to serve 50,000 families affected by the earthquake, Habitat has assembled more than 21,000 emergency shelter kits, conducted more than 2,000 structural damage assessments and is building up to 70 additional transitional shelters each week. To date, Habitat has built nearly 400 transitional shelters and expects to build more than 31,000 of these shelters over the next five years. While Habitat fully anticipates meeting this goal, our success is dependent on the resolution of land issues and the ability of families to obtain secure land tenure during the resettlement process.

I will address three broad issues in this testimony: the nature of Haiti's shelter crisis; essential principles and priorities for effective shelter interventions and Habitat's recommendations regarding how the United States and the international community can assist Haiti in addressing these challenges.

First of all, I would like to put a face on the Haiti shelter crisis by telling the story of one family we are helping in Léogâne, a city about 18 miles west of Port-au-Prince and very near the epicenter of the January earthquake. Their experience demonstrates the very real and trying nature of this disaster.

Rose Flore Charles and her three young children spent January 12, 2010, at the Léogâne home of her mother. Thankfully, they were not in their small apartment across town at 4:53 p.m. when the building collapsed during the earthquake and three of their neighbors were killed. In that minute, nearly 90 percent of Léogâne was destroyed. For 16 straight nights, Charles and her children slept outside. In an effort to create a makeshift shelter near her mother's damaged home, Charles hung bed sheets with metal gates propped together to provide a façade of strength. The structure had only a green coat-hanger wire to hold a scrap door tight. In Haiti's rainy season—which brings with it swarms of malaria carrying mosquitoes—Charles' children suffered terribly.

"Sleeping in the old shelter, the rain always got in," Charles told us. "We had to go to the health center and ask for help when their fevers get very bad." As she spoke, a light

rain left beads of water on her shoulders and on her 2-year-old daughter, Guallina Delva.

I am very glad to report that the Charles family now has a safe and dry place to take refuge. Upon receiving one of the first 25 Habitat transitional shelters built in Léogâne, this grateful mother said, “This is not just a transitional shelter for me; it is a home.”

By training and employing Haitians in communities hit hardest by the earthquake, Habitat is now constructing, as I mentioned before, up to 70 transitional shelters a week. Family participation in the building process is a critical component of Habitat’s work. Rose Flore Charles, for example, helped clear the ground for her shelter and hammered in nails.

Haiti’s Shelter Crisis

One of the greatest direct impacts of the earthquake for most Haitians, as with the Charles family, has been the loss of their homes. In total, nearly 1.5 million people face displacement or homelessness due to the earthquake. Shelter is one of the most basic and essential human needs: It is critical to good health, stable employment and effective education. A failure to prioritize shelter reconstruction will not only deny hundreds of thousands of Haitians a safe environment in which to live, but will diminish the returns of other humanitarian investments and ultimately delay the “re-founding” of Haiti for which the Haitian people have long awaited.

In addition to radically improving the quality of life of Haitian families, shelter reconstruction will stimulate local economies through job creation, investment, commerce and skills training. Decisions about how, where and when the homes of Haitians are rebuilt will have a critical impact both on Haiti’s future economic potential and on the long-term living standards and conditions of its people. To ensure that Haiti’s positive future becomes a reality, recovery plans must emphasize urban shelter and self-sufficiency.

The shelter situation in Haiti today, six months after the earthquake, is dire.

Before getting into the specifics, I do want to take a moment to recognize the tremendous ongoing efforts that continue to provide emergency shelter and other services to families in need. As of July 9, Habitat for Humanity and other shelter agencies in Haiti have distributed close to 100,000 tents and more than 680,000 tarps. This is a scale of delivery never before achieved in disaster response.

However, people displaced in settlement sites after the earthquake continue to struggle to meet their most basic needs. While original tallies estimated the disaster had displaced 1.2 million Haitians from their homes, that estimate has now increased to more than 1.5 million.

Of the estimated 570,000 people who left Port au Prince after the earthquake, well over half have returned. Displaced persons live in more than 1,300 settlements scattered across the affected areas of Haiti, with less than 25% having a designated camp management agency.

These displaced people face extreme uncertainty, as their futures are threatened by forced evictions, unsound improvised shelters and emergency shelter materials that have deteriorated since the earthquake six months ago. Moreover, the impending danger posed by a potentially severe hurricane season and the existing stresses caused by heavy rains are compounding an already difficult humanitarian situation. While more than 6,000 transitional shelters have been constructed to date, so much more needs to be done—and quickly—to deliver on the 125,000 transitional shelters originally planned.

The Context for Thinking about Shelter

As Haiti and its international partners seek to meet these critical shelter needs, we all must commit ourselves to “build back better.” Housing reconstruction should occur within the framework of a comprehensive urban strategy and development plan supported by the government of Haiti and its citizenry. That plan must take into account such factors as the availability of land and improved security of tenure; land use and environmental issues; the improved delivery of basic services including water, sanitation and transport; national economic development and job creation opportunities; disaster risk reduction measures; the expressed preferences of those who have lost their homes and communities and the special problems and needs of renters given that exceedingly high levels of the population of Haiti were renters prior to the earthquake.

Policymakers should focus on enabling families to return to those homes that are structurally sound; on developing programs to help families fix homes that can be repaired and on planning for the reintegration of many families whose homes have been destroyed and who inevitably will want to return to be near family, community and livelihoods. Policies of urban inclusion and support are essential. It is well documented that in similar disasters, urban populations have increased over time and the acceptance of and planning for that increase must begin now, ensuring that urban investments enable fairness and equity on the ground.

Special Considerations and Priorities

A number of principles, considerations and priorities must be considered in designing and implementing a program for shelter reconstruction:

First, reconstruction plans must aim to alleviate poverty and promote job generation alongside economic growth. From a shelter perspective, this means building houses

near locations where Haitians will work and where they will have access to resources and knowledge that will allow for growth and expansion. Local concerns, preferences and community infrastructures must fully be taken into account to ensure that Haitians take complete ownership of the country as it is being rebuilt.

Equally important are the complex and difficult land tenure issues that face Haitians today. Even before the earthquake, land titles were nebulous or unknown, with a high percentage of property in Haiti lacking clear ownership. The disaster has only made the situation worse. For example, deaths that occurred during the earthquake have not been formally documented, making claims on land by heirs complicated, if not impossible. Obviously, building shelter is risky when one is unable to ascertain who owns the land on which you are building or who will have rights to the shelter when it is finished. Putting Haitians back into untitled homes will subject them to the same arbitrary evictions and above-market rents that they too often endured before the earthquake and will also disincentivize investment in their homes and the economy as a whole. These issues must be addressed up front in a systematic fashion to ensure Haitians do not return to the uncertainties of their previous lives. A successful resettlement process depends upon the government of Haiti and the international community developing and supporting mechanisms that empower local communities and citizens to work together to solve land disputes and ultimately to ensure that security of tenure exists.

This disaster has also underscored the importance of construction standards. It is often said that the earthquake did not kill anyone in Haiti – poor construction and lackluster or nonexistent enforcement of standards did. One needs only to compare the devastation seen in Haiti to the relatively low levels of damage seen in the subsequent Chilean earthquake (which was of a greater magnitude) to see the number of lives that are saved by enforcing building codes that are designed to address the risks inherent in a particular location. Developing and following appropriate standards that can help ensure that new construction in Haiti can withstand the next hurricane or earthquake is critical to creating a better Haiti.

Any reconstruction or rebuilding program must take into consideration gender issues. Historically, in disasters women, men, girls and boys are affected differently and have different needs. Policies and programs must take into account these differences and ensure that issues such as these are addressed: the safety and security of women and children not only in the camps, but in the building design and construction of homes; equal access to jobs and other livelihoods; tenure security relating to joint ownership of land and inheritance rights for women.

Haiti is now frequently labeled as the “NGO capital of the world.” This is both a commendation of the incredible outpouring of support from the United States and the international community, for which this caucus is owed no small amount of gratitude, and a warning of the amount of work to be done in developing local Haitian capacity in

all sectors. International NGOs will not be able to support such large swathes of Haitian society indefinitely, nor should they. To ensure that Haiti remains vibrant, stable and prosperous long after the recovery effort, all international NGOs must work to increase the capacity of the Haitian government, local NGOs, community based organizations and the private sector to address the daily needs and aspirations of the Haitian people.

Haiti Shelter Related Recommendations for the U.S. Government

To address the needs of Haiti, Habitat for Humanity believes that the US government must take the following actions:

- Increase resources for shelter reconstruction activities. As the government of Haiti stated in March, 40% of the earthquake's impact was on the housing sector. However, less than 6% of funding pledged at the donor conference is for housing and less than 14% of the current US Haiti supplemental funding is designated for shelter. Special focus should be given to housing repair programs. Currently, only an estimated \$US 3 million have been dedicated to housing repairs.
- Ensure programs resulting from the Haiti supplemental funding targeted for shelter reconstruction take the above context, considerations and priorities into account.
- Increase resources for rubble removal activities, which is a necessary pre-condition to housing reconstruction.
- Increase resources to solve community-based land tenure issues, with a special focus on renters, since they represent a majority of Haitian Internally Displaced Persons.
- Support the development of a comprehensive urban development strategy and development plan supported by the government of Haiti and its citizenry.
- Increase the focus on and resources available for urban planning, housing policy and land tenure of all major reconstruction actors in Haiti.
- Understand that decentralization and resettlement are distinct and separate issues and that housing reconstruction investments will only be effective in areas where jobs exist.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman and esteemed members of the committee, this hearing is an important step in achieving a significant, successful effort to address the critical shelter needs of Haitians. I appreciate your invitation to participate on this panel and to present shelter recovery recommendations based on our on-the-ground experience and conversations with Haitian government leaders and Haitian families in desperate need of shelter. This is clear evidence of your committee's recognition of the critical role that shelter will play in the successful rebuilding of Haiti. Habitat for Humanity looks forward to continuing

its work with all of you and with the people of Haiti, to ensure that as many Haitians as possible have access to safe, decent, affordable homes in the context of the much larger reconstruction effort to build Haiti back better. I will be happy to take any questions you might have.